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A REMARKABLE LIFE

Remembering Aaron Martin Crane

BY

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CHARLOTTE FISKE BATES



"The pure in heart detect the serried planes of the invisible. To them God is everywhere and in everything. They do not wait for some distant gate to open, but, like Enoch, they walk with God now and here. They behold the beauty of the Lord, inquire in His temple beneath the arches of His trees, see His face in the quivering east at morning, and hear Him speak and sing through nature."—*Lathbury*.



Thy life and work, like a high beacon-light
Will send a guiding glow into the night,
And wildered mariners, on life's dark sea,
Will find their way, by looking up to thee,
Aspiring souls need now despair no more
Of touching *here*, fair Port Perfection's shore ;
The aim that ruled thy life fulfilled may be,
In an uplifted, changed humanity.

C. F. B.

A REMARKABLE LIFE

Such both in character and accomplishment was that of Aaron Martin Crane, born in Glover, Vermont, February 13, 1839, and who passed away at Norfolk, Virginia, in the autumn of 1914. Of his early life spent on a farm in his native town, one may gather something of the general tenor from a letter written by a surviving comrade of his boyhood, and his life-long friend. "I have always had for him," he says, "a most sincere admiration, in boyhood, in middle life, and in old age. I well remember so many of his wise sayings. . . . In boyhood, he often said to me, 'Water will find its level and so shall we. We shall find a place equal to our worth.' . . . He lived for the good he could do. I firmly think his influence for good will continue with greater power in both worlds." It will be seen that though the lad's favorite saying is common, yet to use it with such a sense of corresponding truth in the affairs of men is not common in the case of a stripling.

No doubt the boy enjoyed the sports that the young delight in, for it has been said that even towards the close of his busy life, he ever found a pleasant relief in some active, outdoor game; with boys he became a boy.

The public schools, an academy, and the Newbury Seminary—attended but for a term—gave Mr. Crane an excellent basis on which to build such an education as equalled, practically, what is afforded by a college curriculum. Snatches of leisure, we may well believe, were diligently devoted to the pursuit of his chosen studies. At all events, his writings and conversation proved his comprehensive knowledge of language, science, and literature.

His was a life of vicissitude. From 1862 to 1865, he served in the war of that period, entering as a private in a Vermont cavalry company, and becoming successively, lieutenant and captain. The same year in which he left the army, he became editor of a Republican paper in Westchester, Va., and continued it till 1869, when he was appointed Internal Revenue assessor, which office he held till it was abolished by law in 1873. He used often to say that he never liked the work because "it was hunting the bad." Later, he became special agent in charge at St. Louis, Cincinnati, Chicago, San Francisco, etc., till 1884.

A varied life is often the outcome of vacillating purpose, fickleness of choice, love of adventure, or repeated failure to

find the true vocation, honestly and earnestly sought for. In other cases, it is the result of a nature denied by circumstance the pursuance of its bent, and taking up conscientiously and industriously, a work which, congenial or distasteful, is seemingly thrust upon one by the kind hand of Providence. This was the case with Mr. Crane. He did what it appeared to him he was *bound* to do at the given time, believing, no doubt, that the Ruling, the Overruling Will would make all these various situations preparatives to the ultimate end that he longed to compass. Indeed, but for his many-sided life, his breadth and depth of experience with men of multifarious conditions and opinions and character, he could not have so well understood human nature, in all its diversity, or the manifold needs of humanity. Nor, indeed, would he have attained that self-knowledge which renders men useful to their fellows in proportion to the amount of it they possess.

As in the case of Phillips Brooks, Mr. Crane's physique harmonized with his spiritual power, and a certain lofty magnetism of presence aided in impressing his hearers, when he taught or lectured, and was no small factor in his remarkable work as a healer. His facial expression, his voice, his whole manner, assured those whom he neared, whether in his classes, in the lecture-room, or at the bedside of the sick, that he *was* what he *seemed* to be; that he had fully tested the Divine Power for himself, before seeking its influence on others. One felt sure of his illimitable faith and his whole-souled sincerity.

In 1906, appeared Mr. Crane's first book, "Right and Wrong Thinking, and Their Results." This work met with great favor; and in 1911 the twelfth edition was issued, and it has been translated into several languages: these two facts alone are a more telling criticism of its value than pages of laudatory comment.

The same simplicity of diction, cogent reasoning, and strength of thought that mark the first work characterize the second also,—“A Search after Ultimate Truth,” published in 1910. In its preface, we find this passage which reveals the earnestness and sincerity of the author: “This book is strictly elemental and fundamental, and because the ultimate criterion is always one's own perception, the reader is never to accept anything on the dictum of another; therefore, he who finds Truth in these pages, must work out for himself its practical application to his own conduct and career, but an earnest appeal is made for careful consideration. Each one is urged by his own

freedom, by the light of his own understanding, and with the fearlessness of the old Welsh motto, 'The Truth against the world,' to follow, with entire confidence, wherever he sees that Truth leads. Truth belongs to everybody, and as Socrates said, 'The point is not who said the words, but whether they are true or not.' It may be truly said that the *search for Truth* was Mr. Crane's master-passion. Hungry and thirsty for Truth, he sought it with life-long ardor, and unflagging devotion. One is reminded of his analogue in art, on hearing of Darius Cobb's recent account of his life-continued striving to realize his haunting ideal of the face of the Christ !

With clarity and simplicity of style, "A Search After Ultimate Truth" is yet too deep and strong for a mere cursory reading. Just glancing through the book impresses one with a sense of the vast sum of thought and study spent on it by its author. The reader surely should give such a work nothing less than a thoughtful, studious perusal, if he would fully understand it. Mr. Crane's mind was distinctly analytic, and his logic, from *his* standpoint, unassailable. Those taking different premises must, of course, arrive at different conclusions regarding sin and evil, but the latter may yet find the work of deep interest, and feel a new impulse to investigate the subjects presented in its pages. The closing chapter, "Immortality," appeals to all souls of whatever faith.

Mr. Crane had profound sympathy with sufferers ; it was his delight to help them healthward ; and his Heaven-derived gift made him marvellously successful in doing so. Yet, as much as he rejoiced in healing a sick humanity, he felt that his highest service was the exposition of Truth, as he had found it. It is a singular coincidence that Aaron has *teacher* for one of its meanings ; and Mr. Crane felt that his highest vocation was reached when he taught what he believed, either by word of mouth in his classes and lectures, or by means of the printed page. It is understood that several MS. works await publication, so that the posthumous writings may contain much to advance the moral and spiritual interests of humanity, and to supplement the excellent works which have so much of their author's vitality, that "being dead, he yet speaketh."

Thoroughness was one of Mr. Crane's most conspicuous traits. This was noticeable in his every-day life, in his teaching, in his scientific and religious investigation. The appendices of his second volume are a monument of thoroughness, showing how he went to the very root of matters. The Greek and

Hebrew meanings are compared — the number of times certain words are used in certain senses; and the exact purport of the word whose meaning causes variance and discussion among biblical scholars is traced to its source. His patience must have been as indefatigable as his thoroughness to accomplish such a task.

Consistency was another shining feature of Mr. Crane's. While teaching the complete charity of purse, speech, and deed, he was careful to maintain in his own life the high standard of the great Apostle as given in the Thirteenth Chapter of I. Corinthians. Like others who do remarkable deeds, and speak and write remarkable words, and live remarkable lives, Mr. Crane had frequent calls to practise the hard, exceedingly hard things named in that chapter as tests of the greatest, the unfailing virtue, Charity. But he kept through all, a Christly walk, and one could not lay to his charge a distance between teaching and practice. Besides the external forbearance, we may justly suppose that Mr. Crane's *heart* attained a large measure of kindness towards those who were unkind to him, for he laid great stress on having the *thoughts* free from resentment and bitterness. Perhaps three tracts of this author's — all effective expositions of the Christ-life — are among his ablest writings, surely as regards practical value, — "Anger," "Forgiveness," and "Cleansing the Temple." The first of these is to be translated into Japanese by one of our missionaries.

"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" is the text which the second essay expounds in a logical and exhaustive way. "As in this, so in all the precepts of Jesus, the Christ, perfection is the thing aimed at, and it will be attained by every one who fully complies with them. It may be said in accordance with popular opinion that this is impossible; but Jesus 'knew what was in man,' and as a reasonable being, He would not have required impossibilities. He told us to love our enemies. Forgiveness is the first step in that direction, and in conclusion of that subject, He said: 'Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.'* The perfection of mankind was His object and His prediction."

While true it is that the multitude are indifferent to their inner life, and the progress upward, there are not a few who are eagerly pressing towards that goal. To such, the message of this Divinely-taught man is welcome and inspiring. One feels that not only to *act* calmly, kindly, forgivingly, purely, justly,

*Matt. v. 48, Rev. Ver.

but to *think* thus constantly, and under temptation, is indeed the straight road to *perfection*, and rugged, rocky as it is — and seemingly impossible — yet the aspiring soul has the impulse to undertake it — to seek to be as blameless in the secret soul as the best, the loftiest Christian is in his outer life.

What a beautiful forgiveness does the tract of that name set forth! Not a formal, grudging affair; not the words merely or the deeds, but the *heart* pardon, thrusting the very memory of the wrong from the mind. Of course this cannot often be done on the instant; but repeated striving will gradually become the victor over pride and self-love.

Mr. Crane's theory and practice included financial forgiveness as well as the trespass, and, with his usual consistency, he left a clause in his will, providing for the cancellation of all debts due him.

A very unusual thing in Mr. Crane's healing was his comparative indifference to fees! He believed that if one used the gift of healing unselfishly, serving God in the service of his fellows, sufficient funds would be supplied to meet the needs of life. What was offered, he accepted, but he demanded nothing; and no doubt, he brought many a one from sickness to health without receiving any payment but gratitude.

The same generous treatment was shown in the case of his classes; those who could not afford to pay had the free gift of his teaching.

Mr. Crane's marriage, which took place in 1865, was one of the best proofs that true unions are possible. At one time, before his wife's passing, he was so near the verge, it was thought that his going might precede hers; his long and unremitting devotion to her, while yet his own health was impaired, left him worn and exhausted; for humanity *is* humanity, say what one will; man *is* mortal, and Death comes at last, as a recognized messenger of the Divine Will. More than one friend of the two has said that it seemed as though Mrs. Crane's desire was so intense to have her husband rejoin her, she drew him, as it were, into the Heaven where they would be forever inseparable. The following passages from "Immortality," the closing chapter of "A Search After Ultimate Truth," seem peculiarly pertinent here: — "Herein is an authoritative answer to the question which Love so often asks, 'Shall we meet and know each other again?' Three things are absolutely proved: we continue to live; each continues to be his own distinct self; and each continues to possess his own mind with its own intelligence; therefore we *must*

know each other with even more certainty than we do now, 'for now we see through a glass darkly, but then, face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know as also I am known.' Just as surely as God is God, just so surely shall we know each other hereafter. . . . Our existence is so involved in the warp and woof of the nature of God, that the unending life of our true and real selves is as far from question as is the life of God Himself."

We cannot omit from this tribute a passage from the letter written by a prominent member of a well-known Boston publishing-house to the foster-daughter of Mr. Crane, on hearing that the latter had passed away: "We have never known any one — man or woman — who, at all times seemed so far above all petty weaknesses of character or temperament. . . . May the healing touch of Time hasten to efface natural grief, with the glorious and assured memory of a noble and helpful life, which may not idly be compared to that of the Man of Nazareth." This expresses the conviction of many.

On Mr. Crane's seventieth birthday anniversary, he received the following poem:—

TO AARON MARTIN CRANE

1839—1909—Feb. 13th

Aaron (Heb. Inspired)

Lofty the meaning of thy name, O friend!
And with it, life and work how richly chord!
Whether thy power is breathed abroad or penned,
One feels the inspiration of the Lord.

What are the years to such a one as thou,
Bent on high errands for humanity?
Thou workest ever in God's blessed Now,
And reckest not of age, or time To-Be.

With her whose life and thine are so at one,
May a far future find thee as to-day,
Through God's inbreathing, still new work begun,
And with rich fruitage of the far-away.

On that birthday, six years ago, Mr. Crane must have been absorbingly busy with the work that appeared in the March of 1910, and whose dedication is: "To my Wife, my faithful companion in my work and in my life." Well may we believe that the poetic vision is fulfilled, in this not "far future," and that amidst the "rich fruitage" of their earthly activities, the risen ones with "still new work begun" are rejoicing in the glory of Easter light.

NOTE. Condensed by the Editor of the Boston Transcript, this tribute appeared there March 27th.



